

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

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**BALANCING DIALOGUE: UNDERSTANDING INFLUENCES ON US CIVIL-  
MILITARY RELATIONS WITHIN A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH**

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## **Abstract**

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks the United States has added to a significant national security apparatus to address gaps in intelligence and security agencies and better respond to a dynamic and increasingly complex international security environment. However, these changes did not necessarily result in better policy. As national security experts expressed dissatisfaction with the United States government's ability to develop comprehensive solutions, departments and agencies shifted focus toward a whole-of-government approach. While the military is just one institution among many in the national security establishment, much of the time it seems to dominate the solution. With subordination to civilian control a primary principle underlying beliefs about democratic governance, the concern about ensuring the military does what its political leaders ask of it is even more important as one considers an ever increasing capacity of the military to influence Executive Branch actions. Through the lens of civil-military relations, this paper seeks to understand the ways in which a whole-of-government approach might be influencing civil-military relations, potentially causing an unbalanced relationship where military influence undermines or even overrides civilian control. It proposes that changes in the international security environment, budget or policy goal orientations to national security, or the real-time information landscape without structural adjustments to national security institutions become underlying drivers of unbalanced civil-military relations. Using the case study of "Goldwater-Nichols Act" of 1986, the paper demonstrates how structural changes to national defense institutions sought to address changes in these variables and resulted in balanced civil-military relations. It then looks to today's environment to explain current civil-military relations and provide a few of the more prominent recommendations for reform existent in the public debate.

## Contents

Disclaimer .....	i
Introduction .....	1
Professional Boundaries of Civil-Military Relations in the United States .....	2
Influences on the US Civil-Military Relationship and Institutional Reflections .....	7
Goldwater-Nichols: Updating Institutions to Reflect Professional Boundaries .....	10
A Whole of Government Approach, Time for Institutional Reform? .....	13
Conclusions .....	18
Bibliography .....	24



## **Introduction**

Over the last two decades the international security environment has undergone vast changes as the United States solidified its place as the predominant power while facing an ever evolving threat from first, non-state actors, and now, a resurgence of near-peer competitors. The creation of the Department of Homeland Security and a host of reforms in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks to address gaps in intelligence and security agencies marked significant domestic changes as well. These new agencies, or agencies who gained additional mission areas and resources, added to the already significant national security apparatus of the United States. These external and internal changes however did not necessarily result in better policy. National security experts have expressed dissatisfaction with the ability of the government to come up with comprehensive solutions to complex problems when those solutions run counter to agencies' institutional, bureaucratic norms. A central policy debate both within and outside of the government now centers around how to achieve a whole-of-government approach to national security issues.<sup>1</sup> The military is but one institution among many as the United States pursues national security interests, yet much of the time it seems to dominate the solution. Where subordination to civilian control is a primary principle, the concern about ensuring the military does what its political leaders ask of it is even more important, especially when one considers the military's capacity to influence other agencies and departments within the Executive Branch regarding national security issues. Through the lens of civil-military relations, this paper seeks to understand the ways in which a whole-of-government approach might be influencing civil-military relations and causing an unbalanced relationship where military influence undermines or even overrides civilian control.

The term whole-of-government approach encapsulates the idea that the United States should pursue its national security interests through a calibrated composite of institutions across the Executive Branch in order to achieve the best results. An important component of US national security is the civilian constitutional power over the military. Thus, in discussing national security policy, planning, and execution, one must be mindful of the proper relationship between civilian authorities and military personnel. The relationship requires balance in order to preserve civilian control over the military while empowering the military to be most effective in accomplishing missions asked of it.<sup>2</sup> Balanced civil-military relations exist when political leaders and military leaders understand, agree on, and respect the professional boundaries that each party must adhere to during the development and execution of national security policy. This relationship can become unbalanced when changes occur in the international security environment, budget or policy goal orientations to national security vary, or the real-time information landscape alters and structural adjustments to national security institutions do not ensue. The imbalance becomes more evident as senior military leaders engage in political activity and political leaders exhibit distrust of senior military leadership. As external influencers change, driving a renegotiation of the civil-military relationship, the most enduring way to bring it back in balance is through executive or legislative changes to national security institutions in order to formalize the updated professional boundaries.

### **Professional Boundaries of Civil-Military Relations in the United States**

Since its independence, explicit constitutional authorities and political practices in the United States deeply imbedded the principle of civilian control through elected political representatives. The Constitution gives the legislative and executive branch a share of primary

authority and responsibility for the military and thus it answers to those elected representatives of the people serving in designated leadership positions. Additionally, the first commander in chief and general of the Army, George Washington, set American standards for civil-military relations in hallmark speeches such as his address to the officers at Newburgh, where he reminded officers of their obligations to the nation. Washington was also very public and candid about his own decision to resign as an officer prior to taking office as president.<sup>3</sup> Despite the monopoly on coercive power, the military accepts its position as subordinate to civilian control and has never threatened a coup d'état in the United States. Yet, the lack of a coup d'état is hardly evidence of balanced civil-military relations. Rather, a key component of a balanced civil-military relationship is ensuring the military is not engaging in undue policy influence that would override political leadership and thus undermine civilian authority.<sup>4</sup> Since independence, firm civilian control that promotes military effectiveness has been the desired balance of US civil-military relations and guided the creation of military institutions and bureaucratic processes of national security policymaking.<sup>5</sup>

The foundation of modern US civil-relations scholarship written in 1957, Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State*, is still the main starting point for discussion of civilian control in democracies. Published in the years after establishing standing national defense institutions, his conceptions of professionalism continue to serve as the basis for established norms of behavior for military and civilian leadership in the formulation and execution of national security strategy. His work set the beginning professional boundaries for the military by focusing on the unique expertise in the management of violence, responsibility to the state in its defense, and corporateness of the services as distinct from and legally bound to society. In order to maximize the effectiveness of the military while minimizing its threat to the state it serves,

Huntington proposed two models of civilian control—subjective and objective. Subjective control maximizes civilian power over the military by denying a separate, independent military sphere of control and instead “civilianizing” it. This method of control inherently politicizes the military as it draws the military into the normal power dynamics of domestic politics. This keeps the military weak as multiple players—institutions, social classes, or constitutional branches—vying for control split its interests and keep it engaged as another power player in seeking support for manpower, resources, and strategic direction.<sup>6</sup>

Objective control is Huntington’s preferred method of civilian control over the military as it maximizes the professionalism of the military by keeping it politically sterile and neutral, ready to carry out the policies of any civilian group that secures legitimate authority within the state. The intent of this type of control is to synchronize the goal of military security with the needs of civilians by ensuring the military exists to serve the state and not individual groups.<sup>7</sup> Fundamental to objective control is a professional officer corps. In order for the military to act as a profession it must possess a unique and distinct expertise, a societally approved responsibility, and corporate character governing the standards for acceptance, practice, and expulsion of officers. This professionalization of the military should make it politically sterile and neutral in order to carry out the direction of any elected civilian leadership.<sup>8</sup> This standard of professionalism ensures in its most basic form that publically, uniformed personnel are political neutral.

However, the limits of Huntington’s objective control model are that it relies on a clear line of demarcation between the civilian and military sphere of responsibilities which rarely exists above the operational level of war. Outside of execution of military action the lines blur even more when trying to define separate spheres within strategic planning and strategy



formulation. The question is how to reconcile a military strong enough to do anything the civilians ask of them while subordinate enough to do *only* what civilians authorize them to do. Another influential scholar on US civil-military relations, Peter Feaver seeks to better define the factors that shape how civilians exercise control over the military in a way that transcends the concept of professionalization focused solely on the officer corps and not civilian leadership. Agency theory posits civil-military relations as a special case of the general principle-agent theory where political principles seek to monitor and influence their political agents. The theory takes on additional meaning within a democracy. In this political system, the people are ultimately the political principle, though civilian politicians execute that authority on their behalf. Therefore civilians are responsible to the citizens for exercising control over political agents, in this case the military.<sup>9</sup> The military as an agent is responsible to its people but through the governing agents they elect. However, this does not mean the military is a mindless entity to carry out any and every order from the political agent, the bounds of Huntington's original concept of professionalism still apply. The military serve as important advisors to their political agents and therefore must provide honest and expert advice. In defining the bounds of military advice there are two views about the extent to which military professionals can press for their case. The first is that of professional supremacists which assert that when political leaders are subverting military advice and the military believes it is right then they have a duty to ensure their voice is heard, considered and—in the extreme case—followed. The other view is that the military should not have such control over policy as they are not the ultimate party responsible and thus never have the complete calculus behind a decision. Additionally, even in what the military may view as a purely military area of expertise political leaders possess the authority to make decisions when they deem necessary.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, Feaver's adapted agency theory supplemented with Huntington's concept of professionalism still leaves a gap in describing the civil-military relationship. The most important aspect of civil-military relations is that of a relationship which requires both parties engaged in a continuing dialogue for sustaining the relationship. What influences the ability of political leadership to trust the military and the military to trust its political leadership is a relationship in balance. Eliot Cohen, in *Supreme Command*, argues that the military officer is a unique professional with distinct expertise but points out the many areas where political ends and military means are blurred boundaries. He describes balanced civil-military relations as one of an "unequal dialogue" where there is give and take in the discussion on ends, ways, and means between the civilian and military leadership, with the ultimate caveat that the civilian side always carries more weight in order to maintain democratic civilian control.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout the scholarship, the general agreement on appropriate balance in US civil-military relations is one of civilian control while maximizing military effectiveness. While Huntington's objective control model is more an ideal than a pragmatic approach, its intent is one which remains a fundamental part of current relations. Military expertise devoid of politicization must inform national security policy and this is difficult to develop without a professional officer corps founded on and practicing political neutrality. Additionally, in order to execute effective operations in a dynamic security environment the military must be capable of a certain degree of autonomy which the public and their elected political representatives will only continue to grant to an institution it feels it can trust.<sup>12</sup> Rather than viewing Huntington's models as separate spheres one should treat them as a continuum with "pure" subjective control on one side and "pure" objective control on the other. The proper balance of civil-military relations in the United States is one near the middle where the strategic dialogue between

political and military leaders supports both complete civilian control while maximizing military obligations to protect and defend the state leading to a better formulated national security strategy.

### **Influences on the US Civil-Military Relationship and Institutional Reflections**

Institutions formalize the professional boundaries of agreed upon US civil-military relations norms or as Mackubin Owens refers to it, the civil-military bargain.<sup>13</sup> For example the president as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces institutionally formalizes the principle of civilian control, as they are now the highest in the chain of command. The civil-military relationship is a dynamic balance and this paper looks at three variables that influence it. As a dynamic relationship its boundaries are open for negotiation in order to meet the demands of the environment and political preferences. Once renegotiated, institutions should change in order to reflect the updated professional boundaries. Often institutions, as bureaucracies are slow to change, lag behind the changed civil-military environment. During this timeframe military personnel are likely to engage in political behavior by working around institutional impediments. As military political behavior increases, political leaders' distrust of the military becomes evident as they perceive a military shirking, foot dragging, slow rolling or not meeting expectations.<sup>14</sup>

The first variable influencing the civil-military relationship is the international security environment which affects threat assessments. Changes in the international security environment will affect threat perceptions for political and military leaders. When there is a significant agreed upon external threat, changes in the international security environment focus decision makers. When either there are many perceived national security threats or conversely an insignificant

national security threat, it results in discord among decision makers and focuses them on domestic issues. In order to maintain balance in civil-military relations civilian preferences must prevail when civilian and military preferences diverge, especially on threats.<sup>15</sup> The structure of the international system<sup>16</sup> can influence the organization of the military as well as the way in which the civil-military relationship forms. External security threats and internal threats to either the government or the military can affect civil-military relations.<sup>17</sup> Generally, low internal threats and high external threats correlate to better civil-military relations as these conditions keep the military oriented externally and tend to focus the political and military leadership on the external threat to the state.

The second variable is whether budget or policy goals are driving national security decisions. Policymakers generally either decide on their goals and orient national security policy toward them or use budget constraints to decide what they can accomplish. When national security policy is goal oriented it generally focuses decision makers internationally, whereas budget considerations as the primary driver will focus decision makers domestically. A domestically oriented military poses particular challenges for the US civil-military relationship predicated on civilian control as it inherently draws the military into politics. When national security policy is budget focused, the military's comparative advantage over other departments in centralization and organizational bureaucracy complicates civilian control because the military is able to be an overly dominant voice. It is especially important then in this situation that the institutions incentivize behavior conducive to subordination to civilian control.<sup>18</sup>

The third variable influencing civil-military relations, particularly in the last twenty to thirty years, is the information landscape. The speed of information dissemination, ability to access media, and public awareness are all factors of the information landscape which influences

the civil-military relationship. These factors will affect the ability of military opinion to enter the public debate as well as the public's awareness of military opinion. Additionally, these factors influence the ability of the military to communicate dissent or be a part of the public dialogue. Military opinion in public dialogue is an important area of concern for as an institution it enjoys high confidence and trust among the American population and thus can disproportionately influence the public debate.<sup>19</sup>

As these variables change and institutions do not adjust to incorporate renegotiated civil-military professional boundaries the military tends to increasingly involve itself in political activity and civilian distrust may develop among political leadership. A core concern over political behavior by militaries is its undermining of civilian control and therefore impact on national security. There are potential positive effects of military political activity; however, the negative consequences are not worth the risk to weakened civilian control. Furthermore, deteriorated civil-military relations and a weakened internally-oriented military ultimately undermine national security policy formulation and execution while undermining democratic principles of governance, defeating the purpose of any positive effects of military political activity.

There are five ways in which the military engages in politics in democracies—public appeals, grandstanding, politicking, alliance building, and shoulder tapping. Public appeals are the military's statements or commentary focused on advancing particular information to the public about policy choices with judgement indicated on that policy.<sup>20</sup> Grandstanding is a military leader publicly resigning or threatening to resign because of a policy decision.<sup>21</sup> Politicking is the collected power of the military as a voting bloc in elections and can include retired officers speaking on behalf of active duty personnel.<sup>22</sup> Alliance building encompasses the

military's efforts to solicit civilian interest groups or industry officials to influence policy.<sup>23</sup> Shoulder tapping is the military's efforts to solicit legislative support for particular policies or advance a particular agenda.<sup>24</sup> Each of these activities seeks to influence a policy decision made by political leadership. The negative effect from these engagements in political activity serve to undermine military deference to civilian leadership on issues of policy and strategy in an enduring manner and thus they are not worth any positive potential effects on national security which are temporary in nature.<sup>25</sup> As a concise description of a broad category, for this paper these definitions of political activity will serve as the basis for observed political activity indicating an imbalance between the professional boundaries of the civil-military relationship and the institutions which formalize them.

### **Goldwater-Nichols: Updating Institutions to Reflect Professional Boundaries**

After World War II both Congress and the president sought changes to the War and Navy Departments in order to overcome some of their limitations realized during the war. However they differed on the extent of unification needed to streamline operations and encourage better synchronized operations. Ultimately Congress won the debate in wanting a military establishment with diffused authority. The National Security Act of 1947 created a National Military Establishment over the War and Navy Departments containing a secretary of defense with limited powers over the services. It created a formal body in the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well as placing them on the newly formed National Security Council but provided no chairman. Congress amended the act in 1949 to create a formal Department of Defense and position of chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. There were a few other small reforms in 1953 and 1958 all

seeking to strengthen civilian control while giving military commanders operational command of their assigned forces to make them more effective.<sup>26</sup>

From 1958 to 1983 there were no significant reorganizations made to the Department of Defense against the backdrop of changes to the international security environment, oscillation of national security goal orientations, and information landscape changes. During this period the military suffered major operational failures in the Vietnam War, seizure of the *USS Pueblo* and *Mayaguez*, a failed mission to rescue American hostages in Iran, the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, and the invasion in Grenada.<sup>27</sup> All exemplified ways in which the international security environment was changing without subsequent updates to US military institutions.

During this period the Department of Defense made no effort to reorganize and continued to suffer administrative problems in the planning, coordination, and execution of joint operations. As one example, service staffs continued to plan their security strategies without consideration for the constrained fiscal resources during the late 1970s.<sup>28</sup> In 1982 General David Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, testified in a closed door session of the House Armed Services Committee that the “system is broken. I have tried to reform it from inside, but I cannot. Congress is going to have to mandate necessary reforms.”<sup>29</sup> Further political behavior in the form of shoulder tapping continued to occur as other joint chiefs voiced either support or opposition for proposals to Congressional committees irrespective of the official position of the secretary of defense.<sup>30</sup> General Jones subsequently published an article arguing for change as well as engaged in public appeals speaking at symposiums and shoulder tapping by engaging Congress on the issue.<sup>31</sup> Further, indicative of the civilian distrust of the military at the time to enact its own reforms to address inadequacies, Senator Goldwater’s opinion was that “if the

Pentagon is ever going to be straightened out, the only hope is for Congress to do it. The services are so parochial and powerful, there's no way the executive branch will ever get it done."<sup>32</sup>

International security environment and national security policy orientation changes clearly were influencing civil-military relations and necessitated a need to renegotiate the professional boundaries to meet the demands of a changed environment and reestablish greater civilian control. Calls for establishing the concept of "jointness" point to the growing verbalization of political and military leaders' views on the new professional boundaries expected of the military but needing codification in institutions requiring reform laying the ground work for passing the "Goldwater-Nichols Act" of 1986.<sup>33</sup> The reform efforts in the act focused on increasing civilian control, providing better advice to the president, and to improve effectiveness of joint operations. The law sought to address three main concerns. First, the power and influence the service chiefs exercised over the chairman of the joint chiefs and even the secretary of defense to a certain degree was excessive. Second, the authorities of the unified commanders did not match their responsibilities. Third, strategic planning was ineffective because the services sent mediocre officers to joint staff positions and focused them on programming and budgeting rather than the formation of long-range strategic plans.<sup>34</sup> Taken together, these concerns had undermined civilian control of the military and decreased the effectiveness of military advice.

To make institutional changes to address these concerns, the law had to restructure the chain of command to rebalance the relationship between civilian policymakers and military officers. The law reconfigured the chain of command to run from the president through the secretary of defense to the unified commanders and removed the entire joint chiefs from the



chain of command. The law required the president to submit annual national security strategy documents to Congress to which the chairman was to plan fiscally constrained strategic plans. The act made the chairman of the joint chiefs the principal advisor to the president and secretary of defense and placed the Joint Staff under his control while adding a vice chairman to improve continuity in his absence. It increased the power of the chairman to serve as an independent advisor to the president while refocusing the remaining joint chiefs on service priorities to support the unified commanders' needs. Additionally, the law required the joint chiefs and unified commanders to submit contingency plans based on the secretary of defense's guidance to improve planning and strengthen civilian control.<sup>35</sup> It also increased the authorities of the unified commanders.<sup>36</sup> Lastly, the law encouraged a culture of "jointness" by requiring officers to serve time in joint positions to be eligible for flag rank.<sup>37</sup> After implementation of the law, military effectiveness and political leaders' trust improved significantly. Possibly the best example was the planning and execution of Operation Desert Storm in 1991. Coordinated planning and clear mission responsibility from the president down to and among the commanders resulted in "a much more effective fighting force" according to General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of US Central Command—many credited Goldwater Nichols in establishing those clearer lines of authority.<sup>38</sup>

### **A Whole of Government Approach, Time for Institutional Reform?**

Current civil-military relations seem unusually strained by threat proliferation and fiscal constraints as evidenced in recent statements by both senior political and military leaders, but as with the Goldwater-Nichols case these are likely indications of structural inadequacies generating tension between political and military leaders. From policy on Syria, to the response

to the Benghazi terrorist attack, to current strategy on defeating the Islamic State, a significant amount of tension exists between political and military leadership on appropriate US policies. Military leaders are increasingly expressing their personal opinion publicly while at the same time political leaders are increasingly expressing their disregard for military advice clearly demonstrating the appropriate civilian and military professional roles and relationships are out of balance.<sup>39</sup>

The growth of US counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations responding globally to security threats resulted in an increase of civilian officials providing advice in an area previously reserved as a realm of unique military expertise. However, even during wartime pursuing a whole of government approach means it is no longer only military professionals operating in this realm. Using the US response to the Islamic State as an example, part of the current strategy requires building government capacity in order to counter the Islamic State as a legitimate option for people to choose. The military is rightfully ill equipped to build governmental capacity and thus, even while needed for security operations, there are a host of other government agencies needed as a part of the planning and execution process as well.<sup>40</sup> Ensuring the institutional boundaries support the desired professional boundaries to support civilian control is critical to restoring balance.

As civilian officials increasingly helped develop and implement counterterrorism and counterinsurgency strategies it has given them a more clear and realistic understanding of what military force is capable of achieving outside the military institutional expertise. This has led to an increase in civilian officials' critiques and questioning of military operational plans and professional advice on the use of force.<sup>41</sup> However, capacity and processes in primarily civilian departments and agencies is undersupplied compared to the military. As a result the tendency is

to fill the gap with the Department of Defense in areas of national security such as regional diplomacy and post-conflict reconstruction. The military often labels these civilian agencies as weak or unwilling to do their missions in difficult environments when the issue is actually a lack of capacity and processes. This undermines respect for these agencies and the role of civilian control encouraging military personnel to openly question political leadership decisions and work around the chain of command.<sup>42</sup>

Public demand for real-time news has increased the appetite for having an unnamed government source expounding on sensitive foreign policy issues. The increase in imbedded reporting from the last decade has built a cadre of journalists who have direct connections to now-senior military officials. These reporters are able to gain and report inside information unlike ever before.<sup>43</sup> Military leadership seem more willing to discuss their personal opinions in op-eds, blogs, and other media increasing the amount of military opinion in the public sphere of debate.<sup>44</sup> In 2004 General Peter Pace, then-Vice Chairman of the JCS, began a public appeal campaign in speeches to both public and Department of Defense audiences calling for a “Goldwater-Nichols for the interagency” emphasizing that creating a more whole-of-government environment would take legislation to establish the same “jointness” which occurred after the Goldwater-Nichols Act.<sup>45</sup>

While the intent is to achieve a whole-of-government approach through unity of effort—meaning all government and non-governmental agencies acting toward a common purpose—the processes as formalized in institutions do not support it. For example, when asked recently about how the military would help reform or rebalance to incorporate other government agencies in planning and execution a senior military official responded “I’m not responsible for them!” expressing the frustration for being asked to fix a process which is outside the military’s span of

control.<sup>46</sup> Experts lament that the United States repeatedly fails to integrate its instruments of power—diplomatic, informational, economic, and military—in a whole of government approach primarily because its organizations are ill-suited for collaborative efforts.<sup>47</sup> While post-9/11 reforms have increased collaboration this is largely within the intelligence communities at the tactical or execution level and has not percolated to departments at the strategic planning level.<sup>48</sup> Clearly the solution to updating the institutions required for a whole-of-government approach will need to come from above the individual agencies through either an executive order or legislation. There are growing calls for interagency reform across the executive and legislative branch to incorporate lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan while they are still fresh in the institutional memory of most political and military leaders. These calls make now the best time to pursue large bureaucratic restructuring which takes significant support to see through from beginning to end.

Reform proponents argue the military should continue to manage combat operations with other activities synchronized into the planning but it should no longer remain the lead agency. If the military must prepare itself to take orders from other executive agencies at times, and those agencies need to prepare to give orders, reform of the national security planning process is a critical first step.<sup>49</sup> For internal executive branch reform it only requires the changing of processes or procedures of the departments or through executive orders of the president. One solution would be to facilitate a mindset change by establishing a cadre of national security experts developed across the national security spectrum to operate at the strategic planning level and bring with them the understanding of a whole-of government approach.<sup>50</sup> With a long-term career development program including education, training, and exchange tours at outside

agencies, individuals would gain a broader understanding of the capabilities and cultures outside their own and therefore be better prepared to plan at the strategic level.<sup>51</sup>

Another solution is the creation of a set of interagency personnel who act at the operational level in the same manner as the military services operate in unified commands. These personnel would translate national level policy and strategic guidance into operational actions for the various agencies. Rotation policies which focus on professional development would be required to develop a cadre of personnel with the requisite skills, and integration with currently standing Department of Defense planning processes beyond that of the current liaising cells. These changes would require an executive order to elevate the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations to the National Security Council level not as a full member but still as a part of the coordinating process. This would serve to support the coordination and integration of policy and planning across the whole-of-government.<sup>52</sup>

A third executive branch based solution to retain the president's preferences for decision-making is to keep the National Security Council not prescribed statutorily but for presidents to allow a core set of personnel to remain across administrations to assist with continuity. Within his National Security Council, the president should foster a whole-of-government focus among his departments by shifting to interagency panels or teams to plan presidential priorities rather than department specific groups. Additionally, the executive could ensure additional joint or combined agency training and exchanges across not only military services but departments as well as more opportunities for professional education across all national security agencies.<sup>53</sup>

Executive orders and internal agency reform can only go so far when trying to reestablish institutional boundaries. The reform debates centered around proposals to establish an interagency cadre of national security experts fail to address the institutional barriers to current

national security professional development, mainly that individuals who perform service outside their agency or department are not rewarded with promotions discouraging individuals from wanting to participate. Additionally, current programs have no legislative mandate and are thus subject to change as new administrations have different preferences or just do not pay attention to them.<sup>54</sup> Senator John McCain recently announced a long-term review of the Goldwater-Nichols legislation focusing on the structure, roles, and responsibilities of civilian and military organizations within the Department of Defense.<sup>55</sup> After almost thirty years since its enactment, now might be the time for large scale reform.

## **Conclusions**

As national security experts lament the poor ability of the United States to successfully plan and respond to strategic threats across the international security environment often the blame falls to a poor relationship between the president and the military. However, the uncharacteristically strained civil-military relations of today are not the result of political or military leadership. Rather, the unbalanced relationship is a result of institutions which are lagging behind new professional boundaries renegotiated to address the challenges of the current international security environment, national security policy orientations, and information landscape within a whole-of-government approach. As seen in the years prior to enactment of the Goldwater-Nichols Act where a resurgent Soviet Union and recessing domestic economy highlighted an unbalanced civil-military relationship characterized by weak civilian control, similar trends are evident today. Goldwater-Nichols reformed military institutions to formalize updated professional boundaries that would strengthen civilian control while simultaneously increasing military effectiveness embodied in the organizational cultural shift toward “jointness.”

To achieve another organizational culture shift toward a “whole-of-government” approach requires institutional reform in order to institutionally update the professional boundaries and strengthen civilian control while increasing military effectiveness.

Continuing to plan and execute national security policy according to a whole-of-government approach without reforming national security institutions will continue poor planning, potentially poor execution, and growing civil-military tensions among political and military leaders. The role of the military is unique and the size of the US military is significant potentially leading to more militarized foreign policy as the institution’s capacity to influence other agencies and departments within the Executive Branch grows, undermining the deeply held principle of civilian control. In order to rebalance the current civil-military relationship to reflect the current geopolitical environment against diminishing resources and amidst a complex information landscape, reform is necessary. While there are ways in which the Defense Department or Executive Branch could undertake internal reforms, the rigidity of its bureaucracies will likely require legislative reforms for the most far reaching and lasting changes.

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#### Endnotes

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